

White Hall Academy

Melbourne Road, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 3SP

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	Select
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils are making increasingly good progress and, consequently, standards of work are rising throughout the academy, including in English and mathematics.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are doing well and their progress is especially strong in the nursery.
- Teaching is good across the academy enabling pupils to achieve well. Teachers are dynamic in the classroom and this helps to keep pupils well focused on their work.
- Teaching assistants are highly effective in supporting teaching and enabling individuals, or small groups of pupils, to keep up with the rest of the class.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the academy. They are very positive about their learning.
- Pupils feel safe in the academy and parents agree that staff take good care of their children.
- Visually striking displays together with work in pupils' 'thematic' books show pupils are learning well across a wide range of subjects.
- The art work around the academy is particularly stunning and contributes to pupils' strong cultural and spiritual development.
- The academy nurtures pupils' personal qualities exceptionally well. Consequently, they develop into confident youngsters ready for their next steps in education.
- The success of the academy owes much to the leadership of senior staff, including the executive headteacher. They have focused very effectively on securing quality teaching in all classes.
- Governors are very well informed about the work of the academy. They have been active partners, alongside academy leaders, in establishing high expectations for the work of staff and pupils.
- Governors and academy leaders have clear ambitions for the academy to be better still.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- More-able pupils are not always challenged enough.
- Sometimes, pupils are not given the time to practise, and hence develop further, their writing skills.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team carried out 19 lesson observations. The team also made a number of shorter visits to lessons in order to gain evidence of the quality of support for disabled students and those with special educational needs, or of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A small number of these visits were conducted jointly with members of the academy leadership team.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, executive headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, subject leaders, other staff and a representative from the local authority.
- They spoke informally to pupils in lessons and around the academy as well as holding more formal discussions with representative groups of pupils from Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Inspectors listened to some pupils reading in Years 1 and 2 to check how well they were developing their reading skills.
- In carrying out the inspection, the inspection team took account of the 12 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View). The team also looked at the responses of 120 parents to a survey conducted by the academy in the Spring Term.
- The inspection team took account of 76 Ofsted questionnaires completed by staff.
- Members of the team observed the work of the academy. They looked at the academy's self-evaluation summary, the improvement plan, a range of policies and procedures, documents relating to the work of the governing body and the arrangements for ensuring that students are safeguarded. Documentation reviewed included data relating to students' attainment and progress, records of behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Gulshanbir Kayembe, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Brian Netto	Additional Inspector
Christopher Crouch	Additional Inspector
Angela Podmore	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is much larger than the average-sized primary school. It became an academy in September 2012 and is sponsored by the Learning Pathways Academy Trust. White Hall works very closely with Lyons Hall Primary, the other school that forms this multi-academy trust.
- The large majority of the pupils are from White British backgrounds but slightly more than one-fifth of pupils are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. A very small minority of pupils speak English as an additional language, some of whom are beginners in English.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is similar to the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the academy receives the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for children in the care of the local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is high. Over half the pupils are eligible for a free school meal.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils by the end of Year 6.
- The academy has a nursery and the governing body is the registered provider for the pre-school nursery for two to three-year-olds. The latter was not inspected but the provision for the three to four-year-olds in the nursery was visited.
- A significant number of children join the academy at the start of their Reception year and have not attended the academy's nursery.
- The academy hosts the 'Grow Centre'. This provides support for emotional needs to pupils from primary schools across the county including, on occasions, pupils from the academy, either on a full-time or part-time placement. This centre is funded by the local authority and did not form part of this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the more-able pupils are provided with work that challenges them and enables them to reach higher levels of attainment more consistently.
- Make sure that all teachers give pupils enough time to practise their writing skills and make more selective use of worksheets or writing templates.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children begin in Nursery with skills and knowledge that are well below age-related expectations. In Nursery they make rapid progress in developing early skills. Good development continues in Reception, including for children who join the academy at the start of their Reception year.
- By the time children reached the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage last year, the proportion who achieved a good level of development in key areas of learning, including early literacy and numeracy, was broadly in line with the national average.
- Children currently in Reception classes are on track to reach similar levels of development at the end of this academic year. Children are enthusiastic about their learning and ready to participate in all the activities provided. They enjoy role-playing activities and learning to write.
- An effective focus on phonics (letters and the sounds they make) means that standards of attainment are improving in this area and, consequently, having a positive impact on the development of pupils' reading and spelling skills. Pupils are on track to improve upon the below-average results of the national phonics test last year. Most of those who did not pass last year have done so after retaking the test earlier this academic year.
- In 2013, pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 attained standards in line with national averages in the national assessments for seven-year-olds in reading, writing and mathematics; they are now building on this success well in Year 3. They made very good progress across Key Stage 1 to achieve last year's results, although they were a little lower in reading compared to writing and mathematics. The academy has looked into this and improved the way reading is taught. Hence, pupils currently in Key Stage 1 are doing better and becoming more confident readers.
- Standards of attainment in English and mathematics, including spelling and grammar, at the end of Key Stage 2 are improving at a faster rate than nationally. The school's robust data and other inspection evidence suggest that current Year 6 pupils are on track to improve significantly upon the low results at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2013, both in relation to their attainment and the progress they have made. Although attainment at the end of Year 6 remains below average, the gap between the academy's performance and that of schools nationally is noticeably narrowing.
- When the academy opened, many pupils in Key Stage 2, especially those in Years 4, 5 and 6, had big gaps in their learning. Academy data shows that many had not made enough progress from the end of Key Stage 1, or had even slipped back; others had joined the academy late with gaps in their learning. They are rapidly making up the lost ground and inspection evidence suggests that pupils in Year 5 are on track to reach national standards by the time they get to the end of Year 6.
- Pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium are making better progress than other pupils due to effective interventions such as one-to-one tuition for English and mathematics and special programmes for reading. At the end of Year 6 in 2013, pupil premium pupils were about a year behind in mathematics and writing and about seven months behind in reading compared to others. However, this gap is narrowing as pupils come up through the academy as a result of the additional funding.
- More-able pupils are performing reasonably well and mostly making good progress as they move through the academy. Key Stage 1 results for last year show that the proportions reaching the

higher levels were in line with national averages, especially in mathematics and writing. This was not the case at the end of Key Stage 2 tests in 2013, when few pupils achieved the higher levels. In lessons, more-able pupils in both key stages are not always challenged enough to do their very best. Their books also show that they are, at times, doing the same work as others and not doing work that would help them to develop their skills and thinking to a higher level.

- Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds perform well and those who are beginners in English make rapid progress in learning how to communicate in a new language.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good across the academy and across all year groups. Lessons start promptly so no time is wasted. Teachers are clear in their minds as to what they want their classes to learn and they structure the work well so that pupils move from one task to another smoothly and without it being too easy or a big jump.
- Class displays are used actively to support the work in hand and, during observations, it was quite usual to see pupils get up and walk to a display to help them, for example, find key information or check how a particular word might be spelt.
- Stimulating activities keep pupils well focused on their work. They clarify their thinking by discussing their work with one another or the adults working with them. Questioning is good and teachers probe pupils' understanding rigorously. They skilfully use their on-going assessments of how well pupils are learning to adjust the teaching as lessons proceed so pupils can keep up.
- Teachers use examples well to help pupils understand their work and to give them an idea of the standard of work they are looking for. For example, when Year 2 pupils were writing their accounts about owls, the teacher wrote a short paragraph to exemplify how a paragraph on facts and figures about owls should be constructed.
- Teachers are working successfully at helping pupils to develop a wider vocabulary and encouraging them to be more adventurous with their choice of words. Written work shows that pupils are usually given the time to practise their writing skills in subjects across the curriculum. Their 'Thematic' books show many different kinds of writing and how well their writing skills are developing over time.
- In most classes, pupils are making considerable progress in producing longer pieces of unaided writing. In some classes, though, the amount, quality and range of writing is not quite as good with pupils, at times, not being given enough time to practise and hence improve their writing more quickly. Occasionally, there are a few too many worksheets or writing templates which make limited demands on pupils' writing abilities hence slowing the rate of progress.
- Early reading and writing skills are well taught in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Lots of practical work helps to involve all children actively. In the Nursery, for example, a group of children were engrossed in investigating how water flowed through pipes. Between them, they had created a complex structure of pipes to move water from one point to another. This involved a lot of problem-solving as well as discussion with one another and the adults supporting them.
- Feedback from teachers to pupils is of high quality and ensures that pupils know what they need to do to make their work better. Pupils routinely correct work routinely based on the feedback from staff and, in Year 6, the on-going written dialogue about their work between pupils and teachers is outstandingly good.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Behaviour management is rigorous, robust and extremely effective. Pupils understand what constitutes bullying and know how to behave in the academy. They are clear that they have seen a significant improvement in the behaviour since the school opened as an academy. Pupils know the day-to-day routines and expectations well.
- Some of the academy's pupil premium funding is spent on increased staffing of the pupil and family welfare team. This has had a very positive impact on supporting children and their families through, for example, play therapy, bereavement therapy and parenting classes. Pupils with emotional and behavioural needs have been well served by the team, and on occasion, by placement in the Grow Centre. Consequently, these pupils have been able to modify their behaviour and make good progress in their work. Exclusions are going down and, where pupils are excluded, it is a reflection of the challenges the academy faces in turning around the behaviour of some individuals. This it does with great success.
- The pupil and family welfare team have also had a good impact on improving attendance, and this is now broadly in line with national averages.
- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe at all times and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example, when using the internet. They are confident that should any bullying occur, staff will tackle it. Parents and carers are only complimentary about the academy's actions to keep pupils safe.
- Pupils are polite and friendly. They enjoy sharing their work with visitors and are keen to ask questions. Pupils are developing good understanding of, and respect for, the range of different races and cultures represented in their academy. This has been helped through a language project whereby those who speak another language have given lessons on how to speak their language.

The leadership and management are good

- Staff are very positive about the academy. They are fulsome in their praise of the academy's work and how it is helping them to develop their skills.
- The academy's leadership is highly focused on raising standards of attainment. Progress is checked thoroughly and frequently to ensure pupils are on track to meet challenging targets. Swift action is taken to provide extra support or different approaches to learning where achievement slows. Rapidly improving standards of work reflect the strong capacity for continued improvement.
- Checks on teaching are also rigorous and identify where improvements are needed. The academy has a rigorous programme for the professional development of staff to ensure that teaching improves continuously. Best practice is shared not only across the academy but across both academies in the chain to the benefit of both.
- Subject leaders are clear about their roles and work effectively with senior leaders to drive up standards of work. In English and mathematics, for example, subject leaders have diligently analysed the areas of work that pupils find difficult and are building these into the day-to-day teaching. The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed.

- The academy sponsor, in the form of Lyons Hall Primary School, has provided strong support to White Hall Academy especially in the period of time leading up to the formation of the academy and its early days. Lyons Hall Primary has been particularly helpful in ensuring the recruitment of good teachers to White Hall. Now, the two academies work more as a partnership supporting and learning from one another.
- The curriculum is taught as themes which provide relevant settings within which pupils can apply what they have learned in literacy and numeracy lessons. Pupils have good opportunities to study science and carry out practical experiments. They enjoy learning French. Visits and visitors widen considerably the range of learning experiences for pupils, such as a Shakespeare theatre project for schools, and impact very positively on pupils' broader personal development.
- The academy has used its share of the national funding for sports effectively, for example, to employ a sports coach to improve the levels of activity in lessons, at clubs after school and at lunch time and to encourage more parents to participate. The impact has been positive with increasing numbers of pupils participating in sports clubs and improved levels of fitness.
- The academy is working well in partnership with other local schools, community organisations and with parents. The local authority provided good support to the academy in its early days and continues to provide light touch oversight and support.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are actively involved in the work of the academy. From the visits they make, including to lessons, and information provided at meetings, they have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make. Governors have high levels of educational and other, such as financial, expertise and use this to ask challenging questions of academy leaders. This is reflected in the very full and incisive notes that governors produce following a visit to the academy. Finances are not only managed very effectively but governors have a strong grasp of the impact of spending on pupils' performance. They deliberate with care before awarding any pay increases to make sure that any pay award is justly deserved. Any underperformance is challenged and governors check that it is tackled effectively by academy leaders. Governors ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138575
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	440140

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	627
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin North
Headteacher	Gavin Bradley
Date of previous school inspection	
Telephone number	01255 422825
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